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1992

# Arts and Humanities: Background (1975-1995): Speech 06

Leonard Garment

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### Recommended Citation

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## A VIGOROUS CULTURAL LIFE: ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT TO TO A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

(REMARKS BY LEONARD GARMENT PRESENTED TO  
THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE,  
MEETING XXVI, MARCH 19, 1992)

This is not a happy time for anyone who cares about maintaining public support for the arts. But perhaps the unhappiness will prove useful. It may force us to think about government and the arts with a clarity and discipline we should have employed when we addressed these matters in the first place.

I first entered this policy area more than twenty years ago. The National Endowment for the Arts already existed then, but it occupied an insignificant place in the country's budget and in its culture. A number of people in the Executive and Legislative branches, and from private life, set out to make the Endowment grow, convinced that the arts were of great use not just to a cultural elite but to the nation as a whole. From 1970 to 1980, the Endowment's budget increased exponentially.

Yet one reason for this success also became a major source of the present troubles. The Endowment was not simply sold to Congress and individual congressmen as something that would benefit their constituents by broadening public access to the arts. It was also presented, explicitly or not, as a source of more tangible benefits -- in other words, grant money -- for the congressmen's constituents who happen to be artists or supporters of arts organizations. Most of the congressmen who supported the Endowment cared little and knew less about the arts, but they knew good politics when they saw it.

Thus the Endowment grew big enough to exercise significant influence in American cultural affairs -- and big enough to attract an increasing amount of attention. Moreover, the prizes the Endowment distributed grew big enough so that arts organizations started trying strenuously to channel the money to themselves and their friends.

Over time, for reasons that probably had little to do with the Endowment and more with changes in the political culture, a small number of these arts organizations started promoting works based on the artistic politics of anger and confrontation.

The by-now generously sized Endowment, controlled to a large extent by its artistic contractors, opened its doors to artists who were attacking core

values of the culture from which they stood apart -- from which they were, in the popular term "alienated" -- and of the government representing that culture. Even though this institutional hospitality was limited to a very small number of controversial grants, it became visible to the ever-alert Senator Jesse Helms and the Reverend Donald Wildmon. More important, Helms and Wildmon had public opinion on their side, clearly enough so that congressmen made a full-scale run for cover. The Endowment has become unpopular enough so that not just conservatives but many middle-of-the-roaders in Congress are ready to see it abolished or severely constrained.

I am not one of those people, partly because I was one of the Endowment's many parents and thus want the child saved. A much more important reason for continued support is a personal conviction that a vigorous cultural life is essential to a liberal democracy like ours.

Sometimes, when people make this argument, what they are defending is only a vague belief that ordinary citizens need to think more uplifted and elevated thoughts. This version of the argument is an invitation to caricature. Something much more specific is at stake. The historical fact is that the arts, no less than religion, have been the chief means by which we have, over the centuries, discovered and expressed what it means to be human instead of animal, to be individuals rather than an undifferentiated mass, and to be capable of loving rather than hating one another. The arts have, in this sense, both made a decent politics possible and protected us from being consumed by it. To put it another way, a liberal democracy needs citizens who not only favor popular rule but also understand the value of freedom. In a diverse democracy there will always be enormous pressure to curtail freedom, whether the area of concern is speech or race relations or business regulation. There will be an ever-present temptation to grasp at what seems like the most direct solution to the problem of the moment. But in order to keep our society liberal and free, it is often necessary to exercise restraint and take the long way around.

The best of the arts teaches this crucial quality of self-restraint. They teach respect for freedom, and it is this habit of respect that makes us pause when we are tempted to brush aside the freedom of others. In this area the arts are, I believe, the best teacher because they grow so integrally from the souls of individuals whose creative work is rooted in personal freedom. This is why totalitarian states produce no real art. A child taught to understand the

There is a private school in Dairy that has mostly public school students. You often hear arguments about choice, and people get red in the face over it. But there is no need to do that. It is just common sense. The second largest high school in New Hampshire is a private high school. Most of the students there are paid for by the government. The school board sends the money along with the student to the school. So they have invited that private school to be a part of America 2000 as well.

In addition, Dairy has decided to open its schools at night because many of the parents need to learn more themselves in order to understand what their children need to learn.

What would it take to create the best schools in the world for our children if we were given permission to start over, to start from scratch? The President has asked American business to come up with a couple hundred million dollars and give it to a group of design teams who would then be able to help Dairy create the best school in the world for its kids. In mid-February 700 design teams sent in their ideas. They represent more than 200 businesses -- Apple, IBM, Hughes Aircraft, and Smucker's to name a few -- 100 universities, many teachers of the year, and even the man who helped invent Head Start twenty-five years ago. Those design themes will be available to help communities across America rethink their schools. So we are talking about model schools and about helping communities go school by school through their entire system to create thousands of new schools -- not necessarily new buildings, but new ways of educating children to ensure that they can function as productive citizens in the world today.

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Now why do we need to do all that? And why is education showing up as the national worry? Why do people argue about it and have so many opinions about it right now? It is very simple.

First, things have changed more than we expected and more than we are comfortable with. To work at the Saturn automobile plant in Tennessee, you must know much more math today than if the plant had been open ten years ago. And you must know English and be able to communicate well. Standards are higher.

Second, children are growing up dramatically differently. At Hollenbeck Junior High School in East Los Angeles where I spent some time last week, it is fascinating to imagine what the challenges are for the teachers there. One quarter of the students don't speak English at all and another quarter don't speak it very well. Still it is a good junior high school. They have fairly high standards. The kids who don't speak English must spend two hours learning English and one hour learning to read in English. Then only two or three hours are left for other subjects, which in their cases were mathematics, one other required course, and an elective that included art and music.

So there are a lot of challenges. At the Baldaras School in Fresno, California, in the cafeteria at night parents are learning in their native language what their children are learning in English. In Minnesota a new school is opening in a shopping mall so that working parents and their children can be together more. You will also find a kindergarten in a bank and a school for teenage mothers in Honeywell's corporate headquarters, with government money following the kids to that school.

Everywhere in America innovative educators are straining within our cumbersome education system to meet dramatically different needs. To summarize America 2000, the President has come down on the side of encouraging a movement for radical change. Not because teachers are bad or because principals aren't good or working hard, but simply because they are part of a system that is in a time warp.

For example, the idea of starting school an hour after the only parent in the family goes to work and sending the kid home in the middle of the afternoon when nobody is there is absolutely absurd. That would never happen if schools were created to fit the needs of the family.

One last example, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, which is a reasonably conservative blue collar place, they opened all their schools for thirteen hours a day during the summer of 1986. As many as half the parents used the schools for their children during that extra time. And it didn't cost the taxpayers a penny because the parents paid for it. It didn't cost the parents much either, only \$25 a week if their children stayed both before and after regular school hours, and \$10 if they stayed either before or after. The Federal Government already has programs

that will pay for families who can't afford the program.

It is not baby sitting either. There is a strong educational component to the program. I saw members of the National Symphony down there in the afternoon giving music lessons. I saw kids catching up in math, and even getting ahead in math. I saw social workers there helping kids from broken homes.

They were able to work all this out so that it didn't cost a penny. All they had to do was change the way they think. It could happen anywhere.

Now I would like to invite your advice and assistance. We do not want to set a national curriculum. That would be the wrong thing to do. But we do want to help states change their curricular frameworks -- in other words, what they are teaching. We want to help communities rethink their schools so they know what they are teaching. For example, a math problem today is more likely to say "Take an 8 foot by 8 foot piece of plywood and create the largest possible doghouse" than to ask "What is  $8 \times 8$ ?" So math teachers are looking into ways to teach more problem-solving skills, and that requires a different curricular framework, a different kind of assessment, and retraining teachers.

Lynne Cheney has gone to work to help cause the same thing to happen in history. We are working with the National Academy of Sciences to do the same thing in the sciences. National Geographic is very busy with geography, and we are trying to find a way to work on standards in English. We would like to do the same with the arts, insofar as it is appropriate.

Now, please don't misunderstand. We know that music educators, for example, and others already have come up with some good standards for what they might suggest to a community working on the school curriculum. We want to encourage that. We want there to be as much consensus as possible in the community about what world class standards in arts education would be.

Franklin Murphy suggested to me while I was in California last week that it would be good to have a national center for arts education for the purpose of helping to create such a consensus. So I turned the tables on Dr. Murphy and asked him if he would help me create that center. He said he would.

So, first, we would like to develop world class standards in the arts as we are doing in math, science, English, history and geography. Second, we would like to establish a national center for arts education that doesn't compete with what is already going on, but coordinates and calls attention to the establishment of these world class standards. Third, we would like to create a coalition or partnership, and we propose to call it the America 2000 Arts

Partnership. It would work with America 2000 communities across the country, assisting them as they think about what kind of schools they want, and what kind of curriculum they want. We would put into that process information on how to include the arts.

We would like to use the U.S. Department of Education to give increased visibility to these efforts. For example, Jean Kennedy Smith came by the other day to talk about the Very Special Arts program in Washington, D.C. They had a terrific idea. They gave kids video cameras and sent them out to tell the story of their city. They came back with wonderful things -- interesting enough to be shown on local television. There is no reason we can't begin to share creative ideas with America 2000 communities across the country.

We are not only talking about the arts themselves. History and social studies, for example, might be taught by including the arts, for the arts are an integral part of our lives.

A good role for this committee would be to give us advice on how to best make our American 2000 Arts Partnership useful and active as we encourage thousands of communities to be America 2000 communities. I will look forward to working with you and taking your advice.

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**MEETING XXVII  
OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE  
ON THE ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 1992, 9:00AM**

**PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE  
CONFERENCE ROOM  
1100 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW, ROOM 527  
WASHINGTON, DC 20506**

**PLEASE CALL (202) 682-5409  
IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND,  
AS SPACE IS LIMITED.**

value of art will resist political movements and currents that would make art impossible.

It is this private preserve, the individual impulse to imagine and to transform experience and intuition into art, that is one of the identifying features and central safeguards of a liberal society.

So we must not give up on the Endowment and thereby forfeit its continuing and large contribution to the nation's culture. Instead, let me propose two ideas that might help restore matters to a better balance. First, we must see to it that in the future the entire Endowment will not be held hostage to a handful of experimental art works, particularly in the visual arts and in certain provocative forms of performance art. The Endowment was never intended to support artists across the board; it was meant to give the general public broader access to art and artistic institutions whose worth is proven, insofar as we can judge these things.

Art suitable for Endowment support is by no means the whole of the artistic universe. There is also the realm of art that is on the cutting edge, provocative because it is unfamiliar or because it deliberately intends to provoke. Now that the Endowment has shown the general public some of this sort of art, the public has clearly decided that it does not want to pay for such experimentation. Some believe that when the government decides to support the arts, it gives up the right to deny grants to certain artists merely because of their particular ideas or concepts of art. This is the conventional First Amendment argument. If we insist on using it reflexively, I assure you that the public, prodded by such as Pat Buchanan and Reverend Wildmon, will decide it would just as soon not support the arts at all. What we are talking about is not censorship; it is, rather, an acceptance of the reality that there are limits to what can be extracted from the political process.

This does not mean that we must toss experimental art into oblivion. It is quite possible to establish a separate organization, associated with the Endowment but supported by private money, to support such projects. I have discussed this idea in a couple of places, and I have heard the objection that experimental artists under such a system would be second-class citizens. But I do not think this arrangement creates a second, less honored or less dignified class. What I do know is that to refuse this idea or one like it, and to demand instead that the experimental artists be supported directly by tax money, is to permit witless slogans -- "no tax money for blasphemy," for example -- to dominate or carry the debate, and to write a prescription for the Endowment's sudden death or slow fragmentation and strangulation. I further know, putting it bluntly, that the idea of special support for experimental art will not succeed unless institutional and individual patrons of the arts and of freedom for the arts put their

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money where their mouths are.

There is another sort of step we can take to cope with the present crisis, and it is perhaps more important than the first. We need to spend a good deal more of the available money on arts education. This is an idea often given short shrift because of its noncontroversial, mother-and-apple-pie sound, but it is in fact quite radical. By arts education I mean not just the nurturing of creativity, but the training that also enables individuals to appreciate the difference between good art and bad. I mean a disciplined course of study that follows a child from the beginning to the end of his or her school career. This is the only way we will have a fighting chance to balance the omnipresent cultural rot and hyper-violence that the popular culture has introduced, via television, movies, synthesizer music, and the like, as a steady and debilitating diet for Americans of all ages. It is also the only way to enlarge the private market for the arts, so that they will no longer be as dependent as they are today on a political process that has so little innate sympathy for them.

If the Endowment should not be expected to support all the diverse branches of our arts culture, neither should American artists be as dependent as they have become on the Endowment. Only a healthier private arts market can make this mutual independence possible, and nothing but a serious commitment to education in the arts -- something more ritualistic and empty verbal support -- can create a citizenry capable of supporting the arts through private choice and not just through an uncertain government.

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## SECRETARY OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCES ARTS PARTNERSHIP

[REMARKS BY LAMAR ALEXANDER  
PRESENTED TO  
THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE,  
MEETING XXVI, MARCH 19, 1992]

The America 2000 effort will have its first birthday in a month. It was approximately one year ago (April 18th, 1991) that the President launched a strategy to help the country reach six national education goals. Those goals had been agreed upon by the governors and the President earlier at the Charlottesville summit.

Of course, there is only one way to go about reforming American schools, and that is community by community. We are not a country with a centralized education system. We are a rich, rough, rowdy, complex, contentious nation filled with people of all backgrounds.

There are 110,000 schools in our country. About the only thing you could get agreement on in the education community would be that we should not put one person in charge, telling everybody else what to do. So we won't do that. But we will encourage America to meet its educational responsibilities community by community.

That raises the question, in what way? Well, we have our direction set by the National Education Goals, that is, a general consensus about helping children arrive at school ready to learn, attaining a 90 percent high school graduation rate, and establishing a curriculum with world class standards in a variety of areas. It will be up to each community to decide what those areas will be. The point of goal three is that our education standards must be world class so our children can live, work and compete with children growing up elsewhere in the world. There is an emphasis on math and science in goal four. There is an emphasis on a literate work force in goal five and on drug-free, violence-free schools in goal six.

You might say those goals don't amount to much, but they do. We had an interesting visit yesterday with Dr. Morgan from Florida State University who was hired twenty years ago to help Korea completely change its education system. Although there is no way to prove it, at that time Korea was probably well behind us in terms of the results its students had in core academic subjects compared with how our students were doing. Today they lead the world, at least in math and science.

It is interesting that Korea hired Dr. Morgan twenty years ago to help change its education system,

but the State of Florida hired him only last year to work on its schools. Obviously, we don't always take our own advice.

What has happened with America 2000 in the last year? First, the effort outside Washington has remained bipartisan. The President and the governors worked on the education goals, and almost all the governors are involved in creating America 2000 efforts in their own states. For example, Governor McKearnon has 70 of the 120 communities in Maine working on ways to adopt goals for their own schools to develop a strategy to reach the goals, to develop a report card to measure progress, and to think about creating what we call a break the mold, start from scratch, new American school.

In other words, we are giving communities the opportunity to start over. Here are the goals, here are the kids, here is the money, now take off. Don't be restricted by whatever you were already doing. What would you do if you did not already have a school? What kind of school would you create? Those are the questions we have asked America 2000 communities to answer and address.

Dairy, New Hampshire is an example. When I gave the commencement address at the University of New Hampshire last spring one of the faculty said to me, "We had a call from one of our smaller towns wanting to be an America 2000 community. They wanted our help, and we are going to help them." I forgot about this until I went back to New Hampshire in December to help the governor kick off New Hampshire 2000, and we went to Dairy. They had been rethinking their schools and concluded that it made no sense for them to be open only part of the year. So they decided to open them all year. During the extra time they are going to build on their own strengths, and the national goals, by creating an Alan B. Shepherd School for Math and Science. (Alan B. Shepherd, the astronaut, is from Dairy.) They are trying to create exciting options for kids to interest them in math and science.

Of course, someone then said, "You know, math and science are not the only important subjects. What about English? What about the performing arts?" So they have talked to other schools in their area and encouraged them to open all year and, in the extra time, to emphasize the performing arts or English.

Students are not being forced to go to school all year. This is simply an opportunity for families to take advantage of if they choose. If you want your child to have an especially rich experience in the performing arts, he or she might be able to learn in eight years what normally would have taken ten.